Identification and Prioritization of Contextual Factors Affecting Championship Sport in the Country

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Meysam Rahimizadeh[1*]
Amirhosein Monazami[2]
Shafaq Abolghasemi Atani3

[1] Assistant Professor of Sport Management, Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University, Tehran, Iran
[2] Associate Professor of Sport Management, Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University, Tehran, Iran
[3]PhD student of Sports Management, Mohaghegh Ardabili University, Ardabil, Iran

*Correspondence:
Meysam Rahimizadeh, Assistant Professor of Sport Management, Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University, Tehran, Iran
Email: meysam.rahimizadeh@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-6882-5592
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Abstract

Purpose : This mixed-methods study examined the contextual factors influencing the success of championship sports in Iran. It explored the perspectives and experiences of experts and practitioners and assessed the relative importance of the identified factors through quantitative analysis.

Methods : The qualitative phase used grounded theory. Participants included university faculty members, heads of sports federations, Ministry of Sports managers, National Olympic Committee officials, and other sports professionals. Theoretical and snowball sampling were used, and theoretical saturation was reached after 19 interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS version 22 using descriptive statistics, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to examine variable distributions, and a one-sample t-test and the Friedman test for hypothesis testing. Five sports management experts reviewed the questionnaire for content validity, and their feedback informed revisions. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha in a pilot study with 30 participants.

Results : Managerial, economic, and structural factors emerged as the most influential factors in the success of championship sports. Social factors and values associated with sporting honor were also identified as important to athletes' motivation and performance. The questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.748 to 0.787 across subscales and reaching 0.863 for the overall instrument.

Conclusion : Iranian sports policymakers and administrators can use these findings to prioritize improvements in management practices, resource allocation, and organizational structures. The findings can also inform athlete development programs that address athletes' social environments and incorporate values associated with sporting honor to support motivation and performance.

Keywords: Championship sports, Managerial factors, Economic factors, Qualitative analysis, Quantitative analysis.

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Introduction

Sports is one of the important and essential activities in human society, present in various forms across nearly every human community. Humans have been familiar with this phenomenon for centuries, and each civilization has had its own approach to it. Educational thinkers in the past recognized the valuable and practical aspects of sports, as well as its immense power in socializing individuals, normalizing them, and shaping a balanced social personality (Khoshbakhti et al., 2021). Moreover, sport has always been an integral part of human life and holds a special place in people's daily routines. This activity not only contributes to the improvement of physical and mental health but also plays a significant role in enhancing the morale, vitality, and freshness of members of society. Many of the psychological, physical, and social problems arising from unfavorable social, economic, and family environments can be reduced or even completely eliminated through sports (Ghafari, 2010). Championship sports is the highest level of sports, consistently attracting the attention and interest of both the public and officials in countries around the world. Iran is no exception, with a considerable portion of the country's financial and human resources being dedicated to this cause each year. It is clear that success in championship sports on the international stage is the ultimate and valuable goal for every country. Achieving success in this field has gained significant importance due to national pride, the economic potential through hosting various events, and its broader diplomatic benefits. Today, countries have realized that the development of championship sports and the utilization of its direct and indirect benefits cannot be achieved without proper planning and policymaking. Championship sports, like any other system, requires the establishment of clear goals, strategies, and operational plans to ensure a well-defined path forward while avoiding redundancy, deviation, and the waste of financial, human, physical, and informational resources (Ferdowsi et al., 2021). In fact, financial support is based on a form of reciprocal exchange between sports organizations and commercial enterprises. From this perspective, both parties can simultaneously create value for their own organization while benefiting the other. This approach enables the formation of a mutually beneficial relationship. In essence, sports organizations and institutions provide the unique advertising opportunities they generate to major companies and businesses, ultimately seeking to secure a source of funding to cover their expenses (Heydarpanah et al., 2023). It is essential to recognize that marketing in championship sports is highly important, given the inherent nature of sports organizations and their reliance on public sector support. Sports organizations must design effective marketing strategies aligned with current needs and the ever-changing dynamics of the sports environment. They should actively work to attract more audiences and secure financial sponsors for their respective sports. Championship sports in the Islamic Republic of Iran are no exception to this principle. Efforts must be directed toward strengthening marketing committees and utilizing the latest global marketing knowledge to enhance the marketing performance of this sector. Continuous improvement of performance should remain a priority (Abbasi et al., 2022). Championship sports refer to organized, competitive activities conducted under specific rules and regulations, with the goal of breaking records and earning rankings or medals. The process of this sport consists of ten stages: talent identification, recruitment and development, athlete preparation, participation in competitions, identification of outstanding and skilled athletes (elite selection), preparation of elites, participation in official competitions, providing necessary support for talents and elites as national assets, evaluating the progress of sports in global, international, Asian, and

Olympic competitions, and continuous improvement and refinement (Ghafari, 2010). Over the past forty years, there has been a growing awareness among governments regarding the value of success in championship sports. In many cases, these successes have been recognized as valuable assets that can help achieve non-sporting goals. For the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern European communist states, sports served as a tool to demonstrate ideological superiority, and even for former East Germany, it had an additional strategic purpose. Recently, success in sports arenas has gained various values due to its ability to foster national pride, economic profitability, and its overall diplomatic potential. Governments have quickly realized that, in order to maximize these benefits, they must have a group of elite athletes capable of winning medals (Gholami et al., 2022).

Today, championship sports are of great importance, and the factors that influence them are vast. Even the place of birth has been identified as a significant factor (Qasemi, 2008). The objectives of championship sports include increasing the number of championship athletes, improving performance and winning medals in international competitions, expanding the number of sports included in the Olympic Games, increasing the number of participants in the Olympic Games, and maintaining and enhancing the rankings of national teams (Khosravyan Champiri et al., 2020). The responsibility for supporting championship sports rests with the private and non-governmental sectors, with government support, while the executive responsibilities lie with the non-governmental sector (federations and associations) (Sadrichraghteh & Jalali Farahani, 2019). Championship sports, both as a physical activity and a social and cultural phenomenon, have a significant impact on societies. Given the rapid changes in today's world, championship sports require a strategic approach to achieve sustainable, long-term success. Countries and sports organizations must have a clear understanding of the environmental and organizational factors that affect the success of athletes and national teams. On the other hand, identifying and addressing the challenges facing the management of championship sports in the country involves factors such as the absence of a clear strategic plan, unclear policies and directions, a lack of qualified human resources, rapid turnover of managers, lack of supervision and evaluation, dependence on government financial support, and the absence of private sector investment. Other issues include the inadequate allocation of financial resources across different areas, the existence of conflicting and overlapping regulations, unsatisfactory organizational structures in sports, the inefficiency of talent identification systems and the overall process of championship sports, and the lack of medium-term tactical plans and operational goals. These are among the key strategic factors for improving the management of championship sports in the country (Moradi, 2010). Numerous studies have explored these factors.

For example, Rodríguez et al. (2024) in their systematic review conducted comprehensive, country-specific analyses and demonstrated that a detailed analysis of specific factors is preferred over broader, macro-level factors (Ramos et al., 2023). Similarly, Hauser et al. (2024) examined the relationship between environmental characteristics and the developmental outcomes of elite young athletes, emphasizing that environmental factors such as a focus on long-term development, effective coach-athlete communication, and social networks have a significant impact on talent development outcomes (Ramos et al., 2023). In addition, Gamelshatter and Lolland (2023) critiqued sustainability in championship sports and highlighted the need to expand self-imposed limitations in sports management (13). In this regard, strategic programs such as New Zealand's Strategic Sports Development Plan

(2017-2020), developed by Sport New Zealand, focus on efficient system leadership, collaboration with the National Olympic Committee, and the establishment of a coaching development system (Wieteck et al., 2024). These programs emphasize the importance of creating advanced sports systems and leading innovation and technology initiatives. So far, numerous studies have been conducted on other influencing factors in this area; however, there has been limited research on the fundamental and underlying factors that specifically address the impact of specialized factors on the central phenomenon. Additionally, due to existing gaps in previous research, recent changes in sports in Iran, and the need for practical solutions to improve the state of championship sports, this study aims to examine, identify, and prioritize the underlying factors affecting the success of championship sports at the national level. The goal is to provide strategies for improving performance and ensuring the sustainable development of championship sports, given its increasing importance and its various impacts on society. In this study, we have employed a qualitative approach and conducted interviews with experts to identify the underlying factors influencing championship sports in Iran. While previous studies have primarily focused on quantitative and measurable factors, this research aims to explore the qualitative and hidden factors that have been less addressed in earlier research. Additionally, the study's target population includes experts and specialists in championship sports, whose insights can provide a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding this topic.

Materails and Methods

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, gathering data through semi-structured interviews and standardized questionnaires. The data will be analyzed using statistical software and content analysis techniques. This study utilizes a qualitative research approach, specifically grounded theory. Grounded theory is a qualitative method aimed at discovering and developing theories through the analysis of data collected from the research field. This method enables the researcher to directly extract new theories from data and real-world experiences, updating them gradually and iteratively. The statistical population for the qualitative part of the study includes experts, elites, and specialists in championship sports in Iran. These individuals include university faculty members, heads of sports federations, managers and deputies from the Ministry of Sports, officials from the National Olympic Committee, directors of sports and youth departments in various provinces, elite athletes in selected sports disciplines, coaches, and sports referees. This study employed theoretical sampling and snowball sampling methods to select participants. In theoretical sampling, the sample size is not predetermined, and data collection continues until a point of saturation is reached, meaning no new insights are emerging. This type of sampling is purposive, selecting individuals based on their firsthand knowledge, experience, or specific perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied. Ultimately, after conducting 16 interviews and observing the repetition of information, the number of interviews was increased to 19 in order to enhance the diversity and conceptual depth of the theory. According to the principles of Grounded Theory, the sample size in this method is not predetermined and can vary from 6 to 70 cases depending on the nature of the research (Izadi Onji et al., 2006). For the analysis of the quantitative data in this study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Initially, descriptive statistics were used to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents. For this purpose, SPSS 22 software was utilized to gather basic information regarding the respondents' gender, age, and level of education. Subsequently, to analyze the distribution of the research variables and test the research hypotheses, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, one-sample t-test,

and Friedman test were used. These tests, conducted through SPSS 22 software, were employed to analyze the collected data and assess the validity and reliability of the research findings. To assess the validity of the questionnaire, content validity was used. For this purpose, the questionnaires were presented to a number of professors and experts in the relevant field. After receiving the necessary approvals, the validity of the questionnaire was confirmed. To measure and estimate the reliability of the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was examined.

Results

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: qualitative and quantitative. In the qualitative data analysis, certain factors were considered as contextual conditions that could specifically lead to strategies and recommendations for addressing the research phenomenon. Table 1 presents the results from open and axial coding related to the contextual conditions of championship sports.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Population

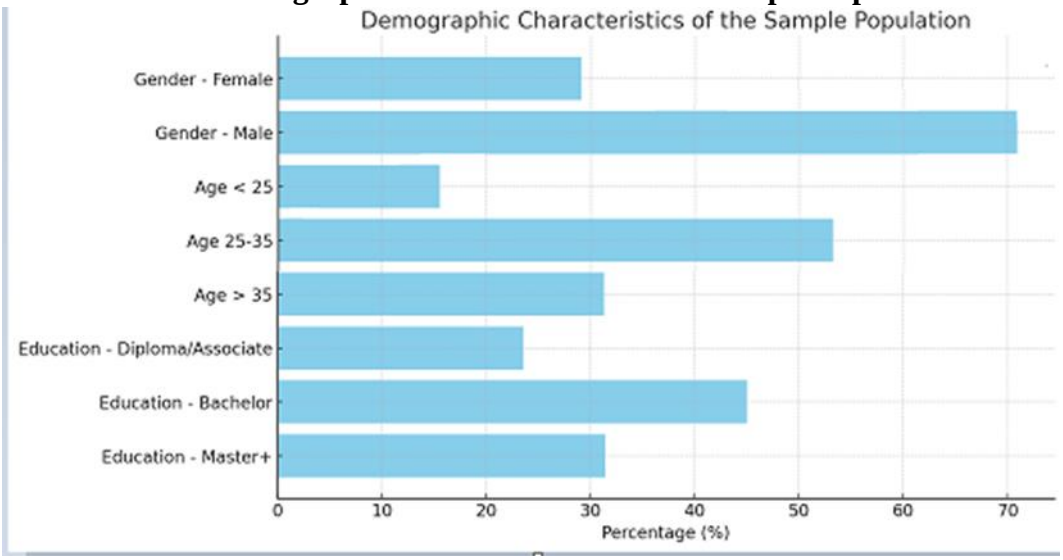

Table 2. Results of open and axial coding regarding the contextual conditions

Components	Concepts	Frequency
Managerial	1. Issues with planning in championship sports	9
	2. Budgetary issues in championship sports	6
	3. Evaluation problems in championship sports	3
	4. Using major events to showcase athletes' power and capability	9
	5. Creating a share for sports in people's consumption basket	10
	6. The higher costs of material 88 compared to its benefits	2
	7. The impact of championship sports on the country	4
	8. Lack of technical control and evaluation system for the import of sports equipment and necessary items	7
	9. Holding Olympics and multiple competitions on national and religious occasions, etc.	3
	10. Organizing sports disciplines/styles	6
	11. Lack of a cohesive statistical and information system for championship sports in the country	2
	12. Neglect of foundational and high-medal sports disciplines	6
	13. Inadequate relationship between championship sports and academic institutions	4
	14. Lack of proper coordination among various sectors in the country, including the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the National Olympic	5

	Committee, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, etc.	
	15. Lack of proper infrastructure in the field of federation activities	6
	16. Neglect of school sports as one of the most important foundations of championship sports	5
	17. Attention to environmental issues in sports constructions	2
	18. Increasing the penetration of new information and communication technologies at the national level	4
	19. Many sports managers in the country focus heavily on medal-winning and performance rather than effectiveness.	8
	20. Neglect of scientific knowledge and expertise in the management of national sports governance	3
Structural	1. Structural issues in championship sports	7
	2. Inequality of disciplines' positions in championship conditions	۶
	3. Suitable platform for championship sports	4
	4. The mutual relationship between the growth of championship sports and media	5
	5. Establishment of a regular Supreme Committee for the Olympics and Asian Games	8
	6. Expanding the coordination network to the level of national sectors despite the presence of nearly 13,000 sports associations.	7
	7. Globalization and proximity to international standards for certain sports disciplines such as wrestling, taekwondo, weightlifting, and others.	3
	8. Drafting a methodology for sports talent identification in most sports federations.	5
	9. Ensuring structural alignment of sports organizations and human resources with the expanded responsibilities and operational volume.	5
	10. Expansion of decision-making offices and structures, including decision-makers, planners, executors, and supervisors in championship sports.	6
	11. Neglect of clubs and professional sports as pillars of championship sports.	3
	12. Administrative health, organization, and financial transparency of federations.	5
	13. The limited role of sports clubs in nurturing talented athletes.	6
	14. Excessive focus on football, especially on the two clubs Esteghlal and Persepolis.	9
	15. Lack of development in professional sports as a booster for championship sports in the country.	4
Economic	1. The mutual impact of economy and sports on each other.	6
	2. Ample assistance in introducing sponsor brands in championship sports.	5
	3. The direct connection of championship sports with the country's economy.	4
	4. Expectations from championship sports in relation to the country's economic conditions.	6
	5. Directing public cash flow towards investment in sports.	5
	6. Weakness in the recovery system of sports federations.	8

	7. Allocation of a dedicated budget for championship sports	9
	8. Advancing the status of championship sports ahead of many economic, scientific, and social indicators.	6
	9. Creating employment opportunities in coaching and sports management fields.	5
	10. Paying the first television broadcasting rights fee to sports in 2021	3
	11. Lack of private sector interest in investing in many sports disciplines.	5
	12. Lack of sustainable financial resources in championship sports sector.	4
Legal	1. Lack of legal information on sports in federations and private sectors.	3
	2. Weakness of sports federations and associations in documentation and existing regulations.	5
	3. Government support in infrastructure and legislation in championship sports.	5
	4. Underutilization of existing legal capacities	4
	5. Supportive laws for athletes (Champion Soldier Law, employment of medalists, rewards for medalists, education).	6
	6. Stringent regulations by some international federations regarding government intervention in sports	4
	7. Establishing a biological passport and serious monitoring of elite athletes to combat doping	6
	8. Existence of articles of association and executive regulations such as the regulation for targeted financial assistance to federations.	7
	9. The risk of suspension of national federations for failure to comply with athletes' non-engagement with the regime	3
	10. Ambiguity in regulations and executive guidelines.	4
Human Sources	1. The athlete, a fundamental element of championship sports.	6
	2. Undefined relationship between coach, athlete, and referee	6
	3. Shortage of specialized workforce in the field of sports facilities construction and development.	5
	4. Significant impact of reputable foreign coaches.	5
	5. Involvement of non-specialists in sports federations.	3
	6. Existence of several million talents in school sports.	8
	7. Lack of influential positions accreditation in international sports assemblies	4
	8. Education, expertise, and relevant experience of human resources in sports	4
	9. Existence of national sports champions and their utilization.	3
	10. Knowledge and expertise of coaches in various sports disciplines	5
	11. Number of active human resources in the sports sector (staff, coaches, referees, etc.).	6
	12. Difference in technical level between men's and women's sports in many disciplines	7
	13. Shortage of top coaches in women's championship sports.	7
	14. Existence of students interested in part-time and volunteer activities, and the opportunity to benefit from internship opportunities	4
	15. Lack of innovative and visionary forces in championship sports.	3

	16. Lack of balance between the quantity of athletes in public sports, championship, and professional sports.	5
	17. Increase in women's participation in championship sports and significant growth in women's medal-winning in major events	6
	18. Existence of educated champions, athletes, referees, and coaches in the sports community.	5
	19. Increase in quantity and quality of professionals in various sports disciplines.	7
	20. Migration of athletes and medal winners.	6
	21. Lack of a comprehensive system for attracting and retaining volunteers in the national sports sector.	4
Hardware	1. Inadequate output of sports facilities nationwide under government management.	3
	2. Poor performance in outsourcing sports facilities.	3
	3. Insufficient infrastructure such as stadiums and training grounds.	5
	4. Presence of specialized facilities and venues in certain sports disciplines in the country.	5
	5. Existence of dedicated sports networks and special programs for championship sports on national television.	3
	6. Ability to utilize new technologies and software in sports science	5
	7. Lack of attention to modern equipment and technology in refereeing and coaching	4
	8. Ability to host international events in many sports disciplines.	6
	9. Existence of championship centers in provinces for planning purposes	5
	10. A very limited number of suppliers of specialized sports equipment within the country	6
	11. Limitations in obtaining hosting rights for major sports events.	8
Social	1. Inconceivable to imagine championship sports without media.	3
	2. People's sensitivity towards athletes' ethics.	5
	3. Increase in athletes' popularity after engaging in charitable work	6
	4. Modeling and positively directing social behaviors	7
	5. People's need for exercise	11
	6. Athletes pioneering in charitable activities	10
	7. Athletes' excessive demands and expectations	9
Sporting Honor	1. Consistency in the outcomes of certain sports disciplines in major events	6
	2. Winning Olympic medals in non-wrestling, weightlifting, and taekwondo disciplines, and the approach of some disciplines to Olympic medals	7
	3. Reasonably acceptable status in winning Olympic medals.	4

Next, based on the findings from the qualitative section, the research model will be presented, illustrating the contextual factors affecting championship sports in the country.

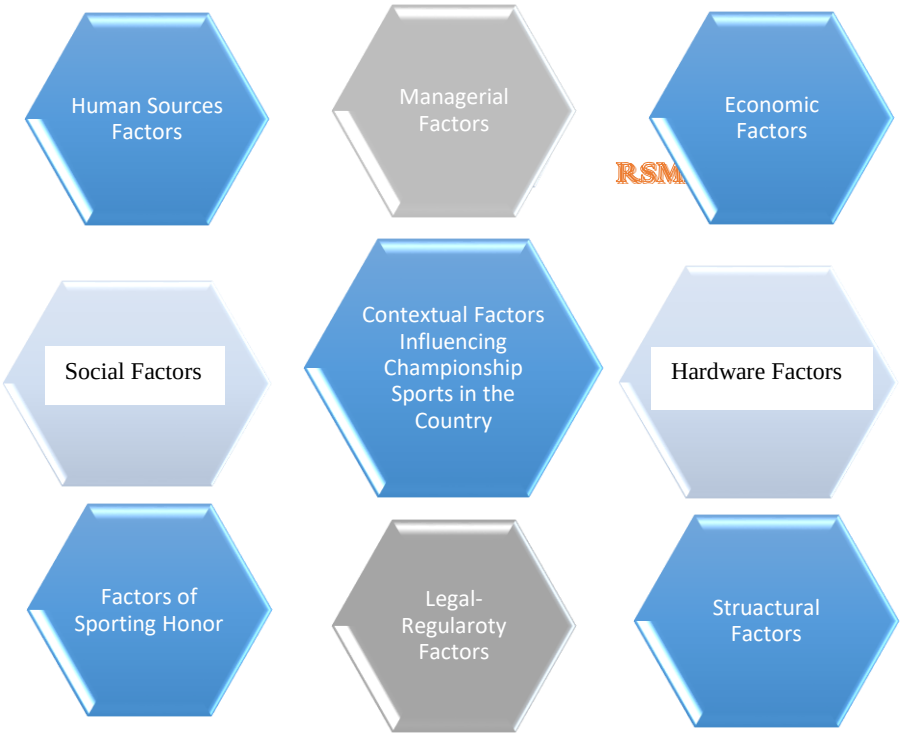

Figure 1. Contextual Factors Influencing Iran's Championship Sports (Source: Qualitative Analysis)

Results and Data Analysis in the Quantitative Section

In this study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. First, descriptive statistics were employed to understand the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Then, to examine the distribution of the research variables and test the hypotheses, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, one-sample t-test, and Friedman test were conducted using SPSS 22 software. For this purpose, the researcher-developed questionnaire was presented based on the results of the quantitative section.

Validity of the Questionnaire

To evaluate the validity of the questionnaire, content validity was utilized, given the standardized nature of the questionnaires. For this purpose, the questionnaire was reviewed and approved by several professors and experts in the field.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

To assess the reliability of the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. The value of Cronbach's alpha for a sample of 30 participants is presented in the table below.

As observed in Table 2, the calculated Cronbach's alpha value for all cases is greater than 0.7, indicating a high level of reliability for the questionnaire.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Values for the Research Variables

Variable	Number of Questions	Cronbach's Alpha
Managerial Factors	5	0/748
Structural Factors	5	0/774
Economic Factors	5	0/739
Legal-Regulatory Factors	5	0/752
Human Resource Factors	5	0/744
Hardware Factors	5	0/763
Social Factors	5	0/735
Factors of Sporting Honor	5	0/787

Overall Cronbach's Alpha for the Entire Questionnaire	0/863

Demographic Characteristics

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Population

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	64	29/1
	Male	156	70/9
Age	Under 25 years	34	15/5
	25 to 35 years	117	53/2
	Over 35 years	69	31/3
Education	Diploma and Associate's Degree	52	23/6
	Bachelor's Degree	99	45
	Master's Degree and Higher	69	31/4

As shown in Table 3, 29.1% of the respondents are female and 70.9% are male. The majority of respondents (53.2%) are between the ages of 25 and 35, with the smallest group (15.5%) being under 25 years old. In terms of education, the majority of respondents (45%) have a bachelor's degree, while the smallest group (23.6%) have a diploma or associate degree.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for research variables

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	Min	Max	t	Sig.
Managerial Factors	3/48	0/735	1/20	4/80	0/105	0/147
Structural Factors	3/62	0/981	1	5	0/143	0/105
Economic Factors	3/70	0/840	1/40	5	0/139	0/108
Legal-regulatory Factors	3/80	0/793	1/40	5	0/109	0/141
Human Resources Factors	3/69	0/782	1/40	5	0/120	0/119
Hardware Factors	3/75	0/757	1/60	5	0/169	0/084
Social Factors	3/53	0/773	1/60	5	0/144	0/103
Factors of Sporting Honor	3/57	0/758	1/20	5	0/095	0/154

As Table 4 shows, the mean values for the research variables are as follows: managerial factors (3.48), structural factors (3.62), economic factors (3.70), legal factors (3.80), human resources factors (3.69), hardware factors (3.75), social factors (3.53), and factors of sporting honor (3.57). The significance level of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for all research variables is greater than 0.05, indicating that all variables follow a normal distribution.

Research Objective

This section presents and discusses the objective of the research.

Objective**:** To identify and evaluate the contextual factors affecting championship sports in the country.

The contextual factors were measured using 8 variables in the questionnaire. To examine the impact of these factors on championship sports in the country, the average scores obtained will be compared to the mean value of 3. A one-sample t-test will be used for this analysis.

Table 6. Results of t-test on the impact of contextual factors on championship sports

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
							Low level	High Level

Managerial Factors	3/48	0/735	9/717	219	0/001	0/481	0/384	0/579
Structural Factors	3/62	0/981	9/480	219	0/001	0/627	0/496	0/757
Economic Factors	3/70	0/840	12/493	219	0/001	0/708	0/596	0/819
Legal-Regulatory	3/80	0/793	15/050	219	0/001	0/805	0/700	0/910
Human Resources	3/69	0/782	13/075	219	0/001	0/690	0/586	0/794
Hardware Factors	3/75	0/757	14/739	219	0/001	0/752	0/652	0/853
Social Factors	3/53	0/773	10/205	219	0/001	0/531	0/429	0/634
Factors of Sporting	3/57	0/758	11/253	219	0/001	0/575	0/474	0/676

Based on Table 5, the significance level of the test for all contextual factors is less than 0.05, and the confidence interval lies within the positive range. Therefore, the influence of contextual factors on championship sports in the country is above the average level.

Finally, to prioritize the impact of contextual factors on championship sports in the country, the Friedman test was used. The results of this test are presented in the table below.

Table 7. Results of the Friedman Test for Prioritizing the Impact of Contextual Factors on championship Sports

Variable	Mean of ranks	t	df	Sig.	Prioritization
Managerial Factors	3/74	74/820	7	0/001	8
Structural Factors	4/59				5
Economic Factors	4/87				3
Legal-Regulatory Factors	5/15				1
Human Resources Factors	4/62				4
Hardware Factors	5/01				2
Social Factors	3/91				7
Factors of Sporting Honor	4/10				6

As Table 6 indicated, the significance level of the Friedman test is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of equal impact of contextual factors on championship sports in the country is rejected. According to the mean rank column, the impact of "legal and regulatory factors" (with a mean rank of 5.15) on championship sports in the country is ranked first, followed by "hardware factors" (with a mean rank of 5.01) in second, "economic factors" (with a mean rank of 4.87) in third, "human resources factors" (with a mean rank of 4.62) in fourth, "structural factors" (with a mean rank of 4.59) in fifth, "factors of sporting honor" (with a mean rank of 4.10) in sixth, "social factors" (with a mean rank of 3.91) in seventh, and "managerial factors" (with a mean rank of 3.74) in eighth place.

Discussion

This study investigated the underlying factors influencing championship sports at the national level. The results of statistical analyses indicated that all examined factors significantly impact the country's championship sports. These factors include managerial, structural, economic, legal and regulatory, human resources, hardware, social, and factors of sporting honor.

Prioritization of Factors: The Friedman test was used to prioritize the underlying factors. The results showed that " legal and regulatory factors," with a mean of 15.5, hold the highest priority. This indicates that establishing and implementing appropriate laws and regulations can have a significant impact on championship sports. "Hardware factors," with a mean of 5.01, ranked second, underscoring the importance of sports infrastructure and equipment in enhancing athlete performance. "Economic factors" and "human resources

factors" ranked third and fourth, respectively, highlighting the necessity of adequate financial resources and the development and improvement of specialized human capital. This study explored and identified the underlying factors influencing elite sports at the national level. The findings show both consistencies and differences compared to previous research, which will be analyzed and compared in the following sections:

Rodriguez et al. (2024) investigated the environmental factors influencing the success of athletes and national teams, demonstrating that analyzing micro-level factors is preferred over macro-level factors. The findings of this study align with the research of Rodriguez et al. (2024), as both emphasize the comprehensive and detailed analysis of underlying factors. However, this study focuses specifically on certain factors, such as managerial and structural factors, providing more in-depth details (Rodriguez et al., 2024).

Häuscher et al. (2024) accentuated the relationship between environmental characteristics and the developmental outcomes of elite young athletes, highlighting the importance of long-term development and the effective coach-athlete connection. The findings of this study, particularly regarding the significance of environmental factors and human resources, are in line with Häuscher et al.'s research. Both studies highlight the importance of a strong coach-athlete relationship and the role of a supportive environment.

Gammelsæter and Lolland (2023) critiqued sustainability in championship sports and raised the need to expand self-imposed limitations in sports management. This study also addresses the importance of structural and managerial factors, which align with Gammelsæter and Lolland's views on championship sports management. However, this study does not specifically focus on self-imposed limitations.

Green et al. (2008) emphasized the international effects of championship sports on government policies and the role of sports in showcasing ideological superiority and fostering national pride. The findings of this study align with Green et al.'s research regarding the importance of economic factors and factors of sporting honor. This study also highlights the impact of championship sports on national identity and economic capacities (Rees, 2010-2015).

Qasemi (2008) reported strategies for the development of championship sports in Iran and the need to establish overarching goals and operational programs. This study specifically examines and prioritizes underlying factors, aligning with Qasemi's views on the need for formulating broad goals and strategic planning in elite sports.

The findings of this study reveal the importance of various underlying factors in the success of championship sports, as well as the prioritization of these factors. These results are consistent with previous research and place additional emphasis on certain factors, such as legal-regulatory and hardware factors, which can contribute to the development of new policies and strategies to improve championship sports. Overall, this study enhances the existing understanding of the factors influencing championship sports at the national level, helping to more accurately identify and prioritize these factors. Furthermore, the study highlights the interconnectedness of these factors, suggesting that improvements in one area, such as managerial efficiency, can positively influence other domains like human resources and infrastructure. The findings underscore the necessity for policymakers to adopt a holistic approach in developing championship sports. Additionally, the prioritization results provide actionable insights for allocating resources efficiently to maximize athletic performance. Emphasis on legal and regulatory frameworks reflects the critical role of governance in sustaining sports success. Finally, this research offers a foundation for future studies to explore

context-specific strategies tailored to the unique needs of national sports systems.

Conclusion

Champion sports can influence social, political, cultural, and economic spheres, highlighting the potential of sports as an industry. However, in developing countries like Iran, sports are not yet recognized as an economic sector due to high costs, limited investor interest, and insufficient cultural appeal. Therefore, supportive planning and groundwork are essential for effective investment.

The main objective of this research was to investigate the consequences of champion sports in Iran. Using qualitative coding (open and axial), key factors were identified and organized around a central paradigm, with champion sports as the core phenomenon. **Causal conditions** affecting this central category include weak institutionalization of succession planning, non-specialized management, neglect of sports in development programs, inadequate laws and regulations, insufficient legal and economic perspectives, and fragmented decision-making structures. These factors span managerial, legal, economic, scientific, attitudinal, and environmental components, highlighting the gap between current and ideal conditions.

Despite the high structural support for sports in Iran, including numerous federations, committees, and organizations, content and program development are misaligned, leading to inefficiency and duplication. Retirement of experienced managers has created a gap in expertise, emphasizing the need for succession planning, talent development, and competency-based management programs to ensure sustainable performance.

Pedagogical implications and recommendations include:

1. **Formulating supportive regulations** to incentivize athletes and teams.
2. **Investing in infrastructure and equipment** to enhance performance.
3. **Considering unknown variables** that may influence outcomes.
4. **Addressing limited access to data** for accurate planning and evaluation.

In conclusion, sustainable success in championship sports requires careful attention to underlying factors, strategic planning, and effective governance. By addressing these elements, the benefits of elite sports can be maximized, strengthening Iran's international sporting position.

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